Laura Anderson Barbata: *Transcommunality*
September 19 to November 21, 2014

Madison, WI – The Ruth Davis Design Gallery will present *Transcommunality*, an exhibition which documents the work of Mexican-born, New York-based artist Laura Anderson Barbata; focusing on the decade-long project she pursued with stilt-walking communities in Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, and Brooklyn. Her project highlights the vitality of the moko jumbie stilt walking tradition and demonstrates the possibility of using this storied art form as a platform for social contemporary performance, group participation and protest. Spanning from 17 feet tall to just 11 inches small, the works presented in the exhibition range from textile-based to sculptural objects, as well as photographs, videos, and projections that document the collaborative projects. A traveling exhibition, the presentation of *Transcommunality* will be on view September 19 to November 21, 2014, at 1300 Linden Drive, Madison, WI. A public Fiesta co-sponsored by the UW Arts Institute with music by Golpe Tierra, performance by Madison stilt walkers, Latin American, Caribbean and West African textiles from the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection and refreshments, will take place September 28 from 3 to 5 pm. A talk by the artist precedes the Fiesta from 2 to 3 pm.

“This innovative show reveals Barbata’s trans disciplinary art practice with stilt dancing communities and artisans from Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago and Brooklyn,” said Design Studies Prof. Carolyn Kallenborn. “The exhibition blurs line between the social commentary, communities and the classroom.”

*Moko jumbies* are stilt walkers or dancers involved in street performance. The tradition originated in West Africa and was then brought to the Caribbean via the slave trade. The word “moko” is derived from the name of an African
deity, and “jumbie” is a West Indian word for “spirit” or “ghost.” Frequently a part of festivals and celebrations such as Carnival, the tradition all but died out in the 20th century until the Keylemanjahro School of Arts and Culture was established in 1986 in Cocorite, Trinidad and Tobago. The school aims to keep young people from Cocorite (an underserved neighborhood of Port of Spain) off the street. With this group, Anderson Barbata collaborated on thematic productions of concurrent moko jumbie activities, filming the performances (which were aired nationally on TV) and connecting participants to larger groups of creative professionals.

Exhibition Background and Detail

Anderson Barbata’s *Moko Jumbie* project, showcased in the *Transcommunality* exhibition, began in 2001 out of her involvement with the school, and presents her work with stilt walking groups in Trinidad and Tobago; Oaxaca, Mexico; and Brooklyn, New York. The title of the exhibition, *Transcommunality*, is based on the concept of building bridges between international communities, in this case, with those practitioners who incorporate stilt dancing into their lives as a way to maintain ancient tradition.

Laura Anderson Barbata is known for her participatory, collaborative art, often involving partnerships with local artisans. The relationships forged with collaborators and the cultural exchanges that take place are the most important components for the artist. *Transcommunality* encompasses community art, public art, social intervention, performance and sculpture, focusing on an artist who has dedicated her practice to confronting the hierarchies of so-called “fine art” and popular art, craft and folk traditions. In 2011, she designed a performance with the Brooklyn Jumbies called *Intervention: Wall Street*, engaging in the Occupy Wall Street movement and the social and economic issues it raised.

*Transcommunality: Laura Anderson Barbata, Collaboration Beyond Borders* has previously been presented at the Centro de las Artes de Nuevo León, Monterrey; Museo de la Ciudad de México, México, D.F.; Museo Textil de Oaxaca, México and BRIC House in Brooklyn, NY. A book, published by Turner, was produced in conjunction. It will subsequently continue in Europe.
Laura Anderson Barbata will have a year-long presence on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. During spring semester 2015 she will be the Arts Institute Interdisciplinary Artist in Residence in the Department of Design Studies. During her residency, Barbata will teach a course on "Community Arts Practice" for UW students, culminating with a lively community performance and celebratory event called "STRUT" on May 2nd. Students will be artists, designers, dancers, historians, theatrical performers, and musicians for the parade and performance, but will also work on meaningfully engaging other students, classes, and community organizations, so that the final event has a larger and broader reach than that of a single course. Other partners on the residency include the Departments of Dance, Art, Theatre & Drama, the Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies Program (LACIS), the Ruth David Design Gallery, and the Edgewood College Gallery. For more information on this residency, please see go.wisc.edu/barbata or call 263-9290.

Laura Anderson Barbata said, “The knowledge of what others are living through opens our eyes and expands our conscience. And this awareness and experience allows us to identify with others and also brings us closer to our own voice, so that we can ask ourselves: What do I think? What is my responsibility? What can I do? I have found that the only place that I can find the answer is in my work, in other words, in the practice of art. The Transcommunality exhibition aims to connect various cultures through the platform of contemporary art in order to initiate collaborations, exchange, and knowledge. Through this exercise of shared experiences and cultures, we are able to recognize and value each tradition as its own manifestation, which connects us to the past while projecting us towards a future in which all voices have a place and are supported by each other.”

Images: (page 1) Laura Anderson Barbata, Intervention: Wall Street, 2011, photo: Frank Veronsky (page 2) Laura Anderson Barbata, Cheeseball Queen, 2007, photo: Stefan Falke

About the Artist
Laura Anderson Barbata is among Mexico’s most distinguished mid-career artists. Born in Mexico City, she currently lives and works in New York and Mexico City, where she is Professor at the Escuela Nacional de Escultura, Pintura y Grabado La Esmeralda of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. Prior to her decade-long projects with stilt-walking communities, Anderson Barbata worked with the Yanomami community living in the Venezuelan Amazon Rainforest, where she created art projects that addressed several needs: for Yanomani to document their own history, to develop an ecological method of recycling obsolete books and paper refuse, and to create new means of revenue without disturbing their cultural and ecological environment. Anderson Barbata’s transdisciplinary work has received grants and awards from the Instituto de Bellas Artes and FONCA, Mexico’s National Fund for Culture and Arts. Since 1992 she has worked primarily in the social realm, and has initiated projects in the Amazon of Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Norway, the United States, and Mexico. Among her most well-known projects is The Repatriation of Julia Pastrana, which involved the return of Ms.
Pastrana for burial in her homeland of Mexico. Anderson Barbata is currently developing an Opera in collaboration with Apparatjik and the National Opera and Ballet of Norway. Her work is included in numerous private and public collections, among them, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; and Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart, Germany. (lauraandersonbarbata.com)

**Links:**
Transcommunality Performance Videos  
June 4, 2012 Stilt dancers in Oaxaca Mexico with the Brooklyn Jumbies  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7AwmHPCFG0

TedX Lecture  *Without the one, there is not the other*  
Dec. 7, 2010 Please click the option for English subtitles  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRzYfaUCCXI

Laura Anderson Barbata Website:  
http://www.lauraandersonbarbata.com

News articles:  
Huffington Post  Aug. 11, 2014  

Current Community Events at Brooklyn Exhibit: Stories and Stilts  
http://bricartsmedia.org/events/contemporary-art/stories-and-stilts

**Related Events:**

**All events free and open to the public located in the School of Human Ecology, 1300 Linden Drive**

**Sunday, September 28, 2 pm,** Anderson Barbata talk, *Transcommunality: Building Community Through Art*

**Sunday, September 28, 3-5 Fiesta!** Reception with performance by Madison stilt walkers, music by *Golpe Tierra*, Latin American, Caribbean and West African textiles from the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, refreshments and dance.

**Thursday, October 2, 4:30,** Anderson Barbata, *Transcommunality: Building Community Through Art*

**Friday October 10, 5-9 pm,** Madison Open Gallery Night  
6:00 Performance with Madison stilt walkers
Third Thursdays:


November 20, 5 pm Carolyn Kallenborn: *Mexican Textiles Up Close* in Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection Associate Professor, Design Studies, UW-Madison. Inspiration for her artwork comes from the rich cultural exchange through collaborations with textile artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her film, *Woven Lives,* examines the role of art and design in cultural sustainability.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Friday, 11-4pm, Sunday noon to 4pm.

Location
Ruth Davis Design Gallery
Nancy Nicholas Hall, University of Wisconsin-Madison
1300 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53704

For parking info: www.designgallery.wisc.edu, click Visit Us for interactive map. Wheel chair accessibility is in Lot 27- Nancy Nicholas Parking Garage.

About Us
Exhibitions in the Ruth Davis Design Gallery explore themes that relate to the creative processes and products of design. We are a hub for research, education and outreach by bringing together the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, Ruth Davis Design Gallery and Ruth Ketterer Harris Library. It enhances undergraduate and graduate programs in Design Studies. The Gallery is free to the public.

*Exhibition is sponsored by the School of Human Ecology and Department of Design Studies. It is funded by the University of Wisconsin Anonymous Fund, Arts Institute, and Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies.*